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Why Not a Joint Committee Of Senate and House for CIA?

Whatsoever power in any government is independent, is absolute also.—

Thomas Jefferson.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON has every right to be apprehensive about a Congressional threat to investigate the Central Intelligence Agency. Unless such an investigation were conducted with uncharacteristic discretion, it could well prove harmful to some of the operations upon which the national survival depends.

This is not to imply that some assessment of CIA methods and operating efficiency is not sorely needed, or even that Congress, which has always chafed at having to vote funds for purposes it could not be told about, should not have a closer rein on CIA activities. But some means should be found of effecting these ends short of subjecting the supersecret agency to klieg lights, leaked stories and political posturing.

If the President is to avoid a Congressional investigation, he should give Congress some assurance that the CIA will not continue to be a source of trouble, embarrassment and impaired morale to the government. Ever since the U-2 blunder the public has been aware that the CIA has its problems. Confidence has not been restored by subsequent events in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, where President Johnson sent the Federal Bureau of Investigation to check on the findings of the CIA. For an organization which perforce considers no news to be good news, there has been entirely too much news lately.

The conclusion reached by most critics of the CIA—that the agency has indulged in foreign policy decisions and action far beyond the area usually delegated to intelligence operations and in some cases has been a law



unto itself—could hardly be more disturbing, especially since the CIA seems to err on the side of bellicosity.

In their book, *The Invisible Government*, David Wise and Thomas Ross concluded that the military-minded CIA is under loose surveillance of subcommittees in the House and Senate "controlled by the most conservative elements in Congress . . . heavily weighted with legislators whose field of competence is military affairs." The authors, both brilliant young Washington correspondents, suggested that the subcommittees should be reorganized to encompass men with wider views and an expert knowledge of foreign affairs, such as Senator J. William Fulbright.

Perhaps the President would accept this compromise, or, better still, another of the authors' proposals, a joint committee of Senate and House members to replace the existing subcommittees. This is the way our atomic affairs are controlled, and as Wise and Ross point out, there has not been any known leak of classified data from the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy.